

# FORCE PROTECTION: A STATE OF MIND

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**T**HE TERM FORCE PROTECTION conjures varying notions and concepts, ranging from neatly constructed, sandbagged fighting positions to snow chains on tires in the winter and thorough precombat inspections. Ask 10 military commanders to write down 10 things that come to mind when you mention force protection—you will see some widely disparate lists.

For military professionals, is force protection a priority or is it a task? Should it have its own place in the five-paragraph order? When discussing the dynamics of combat power—maneuver, firepower, leadership, and protection—the 15 June 2000 draft of US Army Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, discusses protection in terms of field discipline, safety and fratricide avoidance—and force protection. Using examples in an operational theater, this article addresses the primary component of protection—force protection—and its many manifestations.

## Operational Context

During Operation *Joint Forge* in Bosnia-Herzegovina from October 1998 until August 1999, as Stabilization Forces 4 and 5 from the 1st Cavalry Division had many opportunities to implement a wide range of force protection measures and consider how they applied to a unit conducting peace support operations. As the command's top priority, force protection was a continuous concern of the command group and staff, including the G2, G3, G4 and provost marshal. Force protection became more than just a popular slogan in professional journals; it became an embedded dimension of all unit and staff activity.

While force protection never overcame the purpose for being in theater, it remained a primary consideration. Regular assessment of force protection levels required a certain number of vehicles in a patrol, wearing uniforms on and off base camps, clearance procedures for individual weapons, numbers of troop assemblies and control of locally employed personnel on the base camps. When necessary, leaders met to recommend changes to existing force protection requirements as contingencies developed and the operational environment changed.

Dangers in Bosnia take various forms, surfacing occasionally as direct threats and other times as significant command or staff concerns. Acts of terrorism, direct military action by a threat force, civil disorder, traffic accidents or dangerous road conditions, severe weather conditions, disease threats and electronic attacks through local networks or other electronic collection means are a few examples of force protection concerns in Bosnia.

Threats are both active and passive and very often difficult to detect. The key to identifying force protection threats is continual, rigorous as-



A 3/5 Cavalry HMMWV damaged by a TMA-1 antitank mine in the Russian Brigade area.

assessment by staff agencies and subordinate organizations coupled with a thorough situational understanding of the tactical environment. With this information, staff analysis and recommendations, commanders can assess threats to the force and focus on staff and subordinate actions. Protecting the force required constant vigilance and continual estimates on ways to mitigate risk and respond to threats.

The operational aspect of force protection, while in some ways less tangible, was vitally important to the force. These operational missions and tasks were effective in enhancing force protection:

- Countermortar patrols in the vicinity of friendly base camps.
- Blue-on-blue surveillance (to assess ourselves).
- Intensified unannounced inspections of Entity Armed Forces weapons storage sites during the Kosovo bombing campaign.
- Increased route reconnaissance missions on main supply routes.

While these activities were occurring at brigade and battalion levels, division staffers developed a comprehensive reconnaissance and surveillance plan that included traditional air and ground assets, operational security measures and nontraditional tools from information operations. These efforts involved daily synchronization meetings chaired by the Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff or G3.

### **Innovations and Adaptations**

Force protection considerations require new approaches to operational and tactical problems. In some cases force protection concerns may spawn a new mission analysis. In this case, the impact of operations in Kosovo on peace support operations in Bosnia was considered during planning. The staff began a new mission analysis process to consider the effects of operations in Montenegro and to take a fresh look at vulnerabilities, new capabilities and any innovations to increase force protection. During operations in Kosovo, division focus also included information operations to enhance force protection by conveying to the population, and local and state leaders that peace support operations in Bosnia were not linked to NATO operations in Kosovo. Communicating this message credibly and having it accepted was a continuous challenge of paramount importance. It directly related

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to potential threats and effective peacekeeping abilities.

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These actions illustrate that force protection concerns and actions require continual assessment and refinement based on the existing threat and environmental conditions. For example, when the Kosovo bombing campaign began, the 1st Cavalry Division intensified the continuous cycle of awareness, assessment, analysis and action, and then took additional measures to ensure force protection:


- Consolidated logistic convoys.
- Deployed armored vehicles to base camps for quick reaction forces.
- Intensified countersurveillance activity.
- Restricted access to base camps for locally hired employees.

**Shaping the Battlefield.** In anticipation of the Brcko Arbitration Decision announcement in March 1999, which was expected to generate significant civil unrest, demonstrations and

possible terrorist activity, the 1st Cavalry Division implemented a plan that significantly increased its presence in Brcko. The division deployed to a series of checkpoints and traffic control points throughout the city, implemented a robust information operations campaign months in advance, conducted intensive bilateral talks with local officials and conducted several exercises to rehearse the plan. All of these measures also represent actions taken in the interest of force protection.

**Retaining the Initiative.** When efforts to prevent attacks fall short, significant challenges arise. Proactive measures must be implemented quickly to regain the initiative and protect the force. Immediately after the nearly simultaneous rocket-propelled grenade attacks on a joint commission observer house and an allied military intelligence battalion house in Zvornik in eastern Republika Srpska at the end of May 1999, several operational actions immediately mitigated risk to the force. These bold, unprecedented terrorist attacks were intended to kill Stabilization Forces (SFOR); a serious escalation of anti-SFOR sentiment and action in Bosnia. However, the US response ensured force protection measures were exactly where they needed to be, given the new threat, consistent with accomplishing the mission prescribed in the General Framework Agreement for Peace.

The division immediately began to account for all the lone operators in the area of responsibility, such as liaison officers, military intelligence battalion force-protection teams, civil affairs personnel and psychological operations teams, and ensured that their future movements would be accompanied by a certified combat patrol. Division leaders met with local mayors and chiefs of police to explain that this type of



A US Army MP confronts a drunken, unruly crowd following an apprehension in Cernica, Bosnia, 4 April 2000. Quick-forming and volatile crowds can menace peacekeepers, so training for civil disturbances and the use of nonlethal weapons is critical.

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lawlessness was unacceptable and that they were accountable for the actions of their citizens. Increased surveillance—both aerial and ground—covered key routes, all base camps and logistic facilities. All patrols operating in the eastern Republika Srpska were to be a minimum of four vehicles, with crew-served weapons and a platoon leader or platoon sergeant in charge.

Simultaneously, an intensive investigation probed the attack's origins. Intelligence-gathering efforts focused on determining who conducted the attack and brought in assets from outside the theater to assist in the collection, management, analysis and dissemination of information. Anyone could call a hotline and receive a reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the attack. US soldiers increased patrolling in Zvornik and surrounding communities, searching houses and facilities, handing out leaflets requesting information and canvassing the population for related information.

These operations and many others were undertaken to determine who conducted the attack, detain them, ensure they were brought to justice and ultimately deter similar attacks. The intent was to protect the force and ensure that those responsible understood that such grave matters would be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

Clearly, force protection is best understood as a state of mind that permeates all organizational activities, without hobbling operations or preventing mission accomplishment. Force protection needs to be a principal consideration for all commanders, consistent with accomplishing their assigned mission. Too often the issue of force protection conjures up a bunker mentality, but actually, increased operational engagement is usually the right answer. Force, strength and contact are the best counters to increased security threats.

While the Army must always stay ready to fight and win our nation's wars, peace support operations will likely continue to occupy the force. Operations in a peace support environment present challenges both similar to combat and unique to the mission, requiring a thorough understanding of the operational environment's political, military, civilian and coalition context. In many ways, units and soldiers must adopt a new force protection mindset to adapt activities before, during and after operations. Whether in peace support operations or tactical warfighting, force protection requires constant input, analysis and modification by all leaders, soldiers and staff to meet the demands of a dynamic operational environment. **MR**

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